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## THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

phaltum, or bitumen, as it is variously called, has a strange fascination for most painters, and some consider that life without it—art life, at least—is not worth living, as it is said that no other brown, or combination of colours, at all resembles it. Now, a little asphaltum—unlike knowledge—is not a dangerous thing, but when used to excess is a most pernicious pigment, with a strong tendency to liquify, and run over like lava from Mount Vesuvius, as is too clearly demonstrated by the works of the Scottish genre painter Wilkie who by no means stands alone as an artist, who was led astray from the path of permanence by the too seductive allurements of a fair but fickle hue. It frequently happens, however, that the false one is rendered inconstant by the temptations placed in her way by the master. A pigment, though ever so trustworthy in itself, will in time discolor or grow black if diluted too strongly with oil that cannot be depended upon for its purity, and when a meretricious medium or a sickly siccative is adopted in its place, no color worthy of the name can resist its baneful influence. Perhaps the worst mixture of the kind that ever disagreed with a painter's palette is the pasty decoction known as megilp. This obnoxious preparation, which in color and consistency is the exact counterpart of marmalade jelly, is considered by some to be as delicious in its uses as salad dressing is to the other palate, though it has proved far more injurious in its effects than the spurious imitations of oil and vinegar just referred to. Megilp is a comparatively modern invention, quite unknown to the old masters, and since its appearance more harm has been done to art than by any oil or hue that can be mentioned. We have only to glance at the canvases of the last twenty or even fifteen years to be convinced that the coldness, dulness, and lack of luminosity observable in a vast number of the productions painted within that period are in a great measure due to the employment of megilp or some such vehicle. Still, many artists continue to use the dangerous compound, as it is found convenient and pleasant to work with, and in these money-making progressive days anything which facilitates or assists ones labors usually meets with public favor. Fortunately for picture owners and for the undying reputation of our leading limners, megilp with its innumerable varieties is wholly ignored. The late Frank Holl used as a vehicle amber varnish, diluted, may be, with a little nut or purified linseed oil to make it run more freely, and though amber varnish is found difficult to work with, it has proved to be the only durable preparation of the kind extant. It was greatly in vogue among the old masters—more particularly those belonging to the Dutch and Flemish schools—and the permanence and brilliance of their colors are, no doubt, mainly derived from the excellence of such mediums. It is also supposed to have formed the valuable ingredient of the medium used by the Van Eycks. Mr. Herkomer, Mr. Sant, Mr. William Hughes and other prominent painters, “swear by amber varnish,” and the freshness of their productions of several years ago sufficiently testify to the merits of that valuable vehicle, as also of the highly-refined Russian linseed oil with which amber varnish is sometimes mixed. The medium used by Rubens appears to have been the happy one, in every sense of the expression, but it remains to be seen whether the French preparation, just introduced under the title of “Rubens' varnish-paste,” is in all respects the same as that employed by the great Flemish painter. Doubtless, Messrs. Abney and Russell will enlighten us upon this subject as they also will respecting the virtues of many other mediums recommended by our leading color-men, together with poppy oil, copal, mastic varnish, and rectified spirits of turpentine. We may likewise hear something to the advantage of a new valuable and very beautiful pigment belonging to the chrome family, which has just been issued under the fanciful title of “Aurora yellow,” and a pale variety of cobalt yellow, shortly to be introduced under the equally attractive name of “Primrose aureolin.” A word or two may be similarly looked for with respect to canvases in connection with their priming, or preparation, and artists will be reminded that an old and well seasoned cloth is far preferable, in point of durability, to one that has only recently been prepared, and that it, moreover, takes more kindly to the brush. Much may in this way be learned that will prove of the utmost service alike to painters with an eye to posterity, and of value to art collectors who desire to have their treasures handed down to an appreciative posterity. It is, perhaps, too much to expect that an artist will meekly submit to a cross examination respecting the permanence of his productions, or kindly consent to paint only with the materials prescribed by the patron. Imagine, for example, Sir John Millais being required to sign an agreement to the effect that the portrait just ordered shall be painted without mediums of any kind, and upon a particular sort of canvas; or the indignation of Mr. Alma-Tadema when asked to take “something off” in consideration of his lavish employment of an inferior Naples yellow, or a meretricious madder! But after the revelations shortly to be made public by our experts, it is quite possible that intending purchasers will find it necessary to choose a work of art as the vicar chose a wife, “not for a fine glossy surface, but for such qualities as would wear well.” While alive to this circumstance, artists will for the future take care to avoid the fly-

ing color of the paint-box, if only because these may interfere with the “flying colors” which success in all things usually bring about.

### JOHN RUSKIN ON DECORATIVE ART.



WITH all our talk about it, the very meaning of the words ‘decorative art’ remains confused and undecided. I want, if possible, to settle this point for you to-night, and to show you that the principles on which you must work are likely to be false, in proportion as they are narrow; true only as they are founded on a perception of a connection of all branches of art with each other. Observe then first—the only essential distinction between decorative and other art is being fitted for a fixed place; and in that place, related, either in subordination or in command, to the effect of other pieces of art. And all the greatest art which the world has produced is thus fitted for a place, and subordinated to a purpose. There is no existing highest-order art but is decorative. The best sculpture yet produced has been the decoration of a temple front; the best painting, the decoration of a room; Raphael's best doing is merely the wall coloring of a suite of apartments in the Vatican, and his cartoons were made for tapestries; Correggio's best doing is the decoration of two small church cupolas at Parma; Michael Angelo's, of a ceiling in the Pope's private chapel; Tintoret's, of a ceiling and side wall belonging to a charitable society at Venice; while Titian and Veronese threw out their noblest thoughts, not even on the inside, but on the outside of the common brick and plaster walls of Venice.

Get rid, then, at once, of any idea of decorative art being a degraded or a separate kind of art. Its nature or essence is simply its being fitted for a definite place; and in that place, forming part of a great and harmonious whole, in companionship with other art; and so far from this being a degradation to it—so far from decorative art being inferior to other art because it is fixed to a spot—on the whole it may be considered as rather a piece of degradation that it should be portable. Portable art—independent of all place—is for the most part ignoble art. Your little Dutch landscape, which you put over your sideboard to-day, and between the windows to-morrow, is a far more contemptible piece of work than the extents of field and forest with which Benozzo has made green and beautiful the once melancholy Arcade of the Campo Santo at Pisa; and the wild boar of silver which you use for a seal, or lock into a velvet case, is little likely to be so noble a beast as the bronze boar who foams forth the fountain from under his tusks in the market-place at Florence. It is, indeed, possible that the portable picture or image may be first rate of its kind, but it is not first-rate because it is portable; nor are Titian's frescoes less than first-rate because they are fixed; nay, very frequently the highest compliment you can pay to a cabinet picture is to say: “It is as grand as a fresco.”

Keeping, then, this fact fixed in our minds—that all art *may* be decorative, and that the greatest art yet produced has been decorative—we may proceed to distinguish the orders and dignities of decorative art thus:—

I.—The first order of it is that which is meant for places where it cannot be disturbed or injured, and where it can be perfectly seen; and then the main parts of it should be—and have always been made, by the great masters—as perfect and full of nature as possible.

You will every day hear it absurdly said that room decoration should be by flat patterns and by dead colors—by conventional monotonies and I know not what. Now, just be assured of this—nobody ever used conventional art to decorate with, when he could do anything better, and knew that what he did would be safe. Nay, a great painter will always give you the natural art, safe or not. Correggio gets a commission to paint a room on the ground floor of a palace at Parma. Any of our people—bred on fine modern principles—would have covered it with a diaper, or with stripes or flourishes, or mosaic patterns. Not so Correggio: he paints a thick trellis of vine leaves, with oval openings, and lovely children leaping through them into the room; and lovely children, depend upon it, are rather more desirable decorations than diaper, if you can do them, but they are not quite so easily done. In like manner Tintoret has to paint the whole end of the Council Hall at Venice. An orthodox decorator would have set himself to make the wall look like a wall. Tintoret thinks it would be rather better, if he can manage it, to make it look a little like Paradise;—stretches his canvas right over the wall, and his clouds right over his canvas; brings the light through his clouds—all blue and clear—zodiac beyond zodiac; rolls away the vaporous flood from under the feet of the saints, leaving them at last in infinitudes of light,—un-orthodox in the last degree, but, on the whole,



## THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

pleasant. And so in all other cases whatever, the greatest decorative art is wholly unconventional—downright pure, good painting and sculpture, but always fitted for its place; and subordinated to the purpose it has to serve in that place.

II.—But if art is to be placed where it is liable to injury, to wear and tear, or to alteration of its form, as, for instance, on domestic utensils and armor, and weapons, and dress; in which either the ornament will be worn out by the usage of the thing, or will be cast into altered shape by the play of its folds; then it is wrong to put beautiful and perfect art to such uses, and you want forms of inferior art, such as will be by their simplicity less liable to injury; or, by reason of their complexity and continuousness may show to advantage, however distorted, by the folds they are cast into.

And thus arise the various forms of inferior decorative art, respecting which the general law is, that the lower the place and office of a thing, the less of natural or perfect form you should have in it; a zigzag or a checquer is thus a better because a more consistent ornament for a cup or platter than a landscape or portrait is; hence the general definition of the true forms of conventional ornament is, that they consist in the bestowal of as much beauty on the object as shall be consistent with its material, its place and its office.

The fact is, that all good subordinate forms of ornamentation ever yet existent in the world have been invented, and others as beautiful *can* only be invented, by men primarily exercised in carving and drawing the human figure. I will not repeat here what I have already twice insisted upon, to the students of London and Manchester, respecting the degradation of temper and intellect which follows the pursuit of art without reference to natural form, as among the Asiatics; here, I will only trespass on your patience so far as to mark the inseparable connection between figure-drawing and good ornamental work in the great European schools, and all that are connected with them. Tell me, then, first of all, what ornamental work is generally put before our students as the type of decorative perfection? Raphael's arabesques, are they not? Well, Raphael knew a little about the figure, I suppose, before he drew them. I do not say that I like those arabesques, but there are certain qualities in them which are inimitable by modern designers; and those qualities are just the fruits of the master's figure study. What is given to the student next to Raphael's work? Cinque-cento ornament generally. Well, Cinque-cento generally, with its birds, and cherubs, and wreathed foliage, and clustered fruit, was the amusement of men who habitually and easily carved the figure or painted it. All the truly fine specimens of it have figures or animals as the main parts of the design.

"Nay, but," some anciently or mediævally minded person will exclaim, "we don't want to study Cinque-cento. We want severer, purer conventionalism." What will you have? Egyptian ornament? Why, the whole mass of it is made up of multitudinous human figures in every kind of action—and magnificent action; their kings drawing their bows in their chariots, their sheaves of arrows rattling at their shoulders; the slain falling under them as before a pestilence; their captives driven before them in astonished troops; and do you expect to imitate Egyptian ornament without knowing how to draw the figure? Nay, but you will take Christian ornament, purest, mediæval Christian—thirteenth century. Yes; and do you suppose you will find the Christian less human? The least natural and most purely conventional ornament of the Gothic schools is that of their painted glass; and do you suppose painted glass, in the fine times was ever wrought without figures? We have got in the way, among our modern wretchednesses, of trying to make windows of leaf diapers, and of strips of twisted red and yellow bands, looking like the patterns of currant jelly on the tops of Christmas cakes; but every casement of old glass contained a saint's history. The windows of Bourges, Chartres, or Rouen have ten, fifteen, or twenty medallions in each, and each medallion contains two figures at least, often six or seven, representing every event of interest in the history of the saint whose life is in question. Nay, but, you say those figures are rude and quaint, and ought not to be imitated. Why, so is the leafage, rude and quaint, and yet you imitate that. The colored border pattern of geranium or ivy leaf is not one whit better drawn, or more like geranium and ivy, than the figures are like figures; but you call the geranium leaf idealised—why don't you call the figures so? The fact is, neither are idealised, but both are conventionalised on the same principles and in the same way; and if you want to learn how to treat the leafage, the only way is to learn first how to treat the figure, and you may soon test your powers in this respect. Those old workmen were not afraid of the most familiar subjects. The windows of Chartres were presented by the trades of the town, and at the bottom of each window is a representation of the proceedings of the tradesmen at the business which enabled them to pay for the window. These are smiths at the forge, curriers at their hides, tanners looking into their pits, mercers selling goods over the counter—all made into beautiful medallions. Therefore, whenever you want to know whether you have got any real power of composition or adaption in or-

namment, don't be content with sticking leaves together by the ends,—anybody can do that—but try to conventionalise a butcher's or a greengrocer's with Saturday night customers buying cabbage and beef. That will tell you if you can design or not.

If you learn only to draw a leaf well, you are taught in some of our schools to turn it the other way, opposite to itself; and the two leaves set opposite are called a "design," and thus it is supposed possible to produce ornamentation, though you have no more brains than a looking glass or a kaleidoscope has. But if once you learn to draw the human figure, you will find that knocking two men's heads together does not necessarily constitute a good design, nay, that it makes a bad design, or no design at all; and you will see at once that to arrange a group of two or more figures, you must, though perhaps it may be desirable to balance or oppose them, at the same time vary their attitudes, and make one, not the reverse of the other but companion of the other.

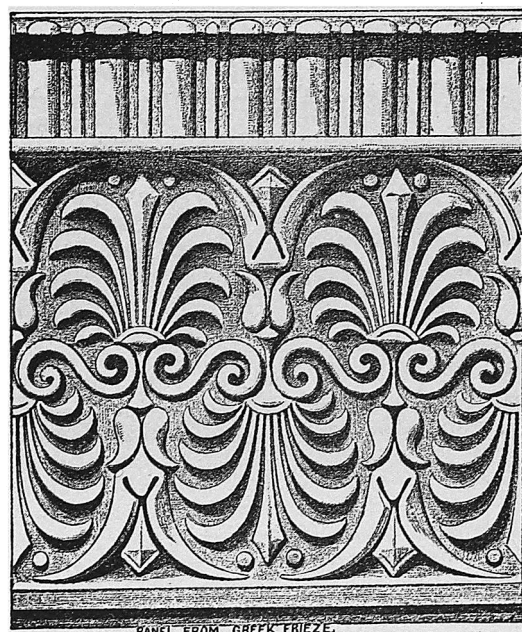
### DRAPERY DESIGNS FOR WINDOWS.

ON page 13 will be found four novel designs for window draperies originating with the London Cabinet Maker.

Number 1, the upper left hand, is simple in arrangement, and is supposed to represent a number of triangular pieces of tapestry or silk overlapping one another. A pretty effect might be obtained by alternating a different kind of material; as, for instant, one lappet should be silk and the next one plush, and so on to the completion of the whole. The fringed swags and silk-covered spindle lattice give a finish to the general character of the valance. Drapery No. 2, on the right of No. 1, suggests a rather more fanciful style of treatment. The idea of confining the festoon drapery, at intervals, by means of silk bands or gimp forms an original feature. The plaited semicircular lappet, secured by radiated silk tabs, is most unusual in conception, and presents a very busy appearance. The style of No. 3 is perhaps more in keeping with the latest fashion in window drapery, which tends rather more towards broad curtain folds, negligently arranged, than the conventional valance. The last drapery on the page is designed on somewhat uncommon lines, and displays a variety of character which forms a useful departure from the ordinary style of thing.

MRS. M. G. VAN RENSSLAER, author of the Cathedral articles in the *Century*, and an authority on needlework as well as architecture, has started the fashion of resurrecting the funny old samplers of fifty years ago by the offer of a pair of silver-handled scissors for the best sampler worked during the Summer and entered at the Long Island Fair, which takes place this month at Hempstead. Every one has seen them, faded things of corn silk canvas, carefully worked in cross-stitch with the alphabet in various styles of lettering, signed at the end "Mary Jane Ruggles, 1820, aged 12," in the same rather wabbly cross-stitches and framed in a little band of gilt under glass by the proud parent of the accomplished Mary Jane. Sometimes, in peculiarly clever families, a basket of very queerly shaped and colored wool or silk flowers surmounted the alphabet, and then the gilt frame was wider and more resplendent. These vanished into garrets long ago, but now every one is searching in old trunks and dusty boxes for their forebears' handiwork and restoring them to the place on the wall from which they were banished. Not only so, but new ones are being made, and modern mothers are setting their little girls to learn needlework and their letters at the same time by reproducing these masterpieces of their grandmothers.

THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER, which occupies a unique field for magazine work, publishes much interesting matter in its September number. Another installment of the valuable "Materiaux et Documents D'Architecture" is given, the publication of which insures the subscriptions of several hundred architects, who look to the work for helpful suggestions.—*Buffalo Courier*.



PANEL FROM GREEK FRIEZE.